

**THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
CLEVELAND 6. OHIO**

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Mr. Paul Mooney-Oct. 29, 1960
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The Cleveland Museum of Art has just acquired an almost complete royal portrait of Amenemhat III, while even recognizable fragmental sculptures of the great King outside of Egypt are brief indeed. To see figures comparable to the newly acquired Cleveland sculpture one must visit Cairo. There, in addition to larger figures of Amenemhat III, is a group of seven sculptures in black Aswan granite, found at Karnak in 1904 and 1905. All of these save one have lost their lower limbs in varying degrees but were originally of comparable size, as is the Cleveland figure.

The Cleveland Amenemhat III, his legs missing from just below the knee caps stands in a strictly frontal pose, only the forward motion of the left leg breaking the symmetry of the body's position. The arms are held down, palms against the rigidly starched skirt while the crook-like handle of a sacrificial knife projects from the belt. The grooved and starched wig-cover (names) roughly a truncated triangle in front view, has flaps that hang in front of the shoulders over the lightly incised representation of the wesekh collar. The serpent ornament (uraeus) on the wig-cover is discernible though damaged. Aside from the two cloths and the jewelled necklace, the pharaoh is nude, a smoothly but powerfully muscled figure. The realistic impression received from the front view is somewhat modified when looking at the back, for then the wig-cover combines with the rectangular supporting pillar and the grooved, flaring skirt, to create almost abstract forms of singular force.

The generally strong block-like character of such Twelfth Dynasty sculpture was inherited from the Old Kingdom and was by this time part of the severe Egyptian sculptural tradition that so delighted Plato when he compared it with what he considered to be the too-naturalistic and un-traditional art of his Greek contemporaries. But the artists of the Twelfth Dynasty added to their heritage a fierce energy, partially expressed by a realistic royal portraiture which enabled them to enter the realm of human feeling and tragedy. The large ears of the king, the deep set eyes,

M. 10.18.60 - Metzler

10.20.60 - Mooney & Kirkwood

11.18.60 - Special

high cheek-bones, bunched muscles around the mouth, and the fleshy but firm modelling of the chin, are powerfully but subtly achieved; and they are hammered into a human unity - a sculptural personality so real it convinces us that this really was Amenemhat III. Perhaps something of this new and human quality can be attributed to the growing strength of the Osiris-religion during the Middle Kingdom. This belief in a spiritual after-life rather than in material continuation after the event of death affected even the concept of divine kingship.

Something of the unusual combination of refined gradations of modelling with bulky and powerful forms can be attributed to the technique used by the sculptors of the royal workshop. Granite is hard enough; but these artists achieved their final refinements of texture and shape by almost pulverizing the stone away. The granite was, of course, also abraded with bronze or stone tools using quartz sand, or possibly carborundum powder. But the granite surface shows in many areas the marks of a metal tool struck while held vertical to the surface. No easy chipping or slicing, no obvious virtuosity - rather a human technique as relentless as time itself, a means in keeping with the traditional and conservative ends of Egyptian art and society, whether concerned with the waters of the Nile or the representation of deity, to hold, to contain - now and forever.

It is possible to date the Cleveland Amenemhat III with a reasonable degree of accuracy. The King's visage is the established one of his later years in contrast to that on the famous early seated figure of yellow limestone in Cairo. The grooves of the wig-cover are simply patterned with no reinforcing lines as in earlier figures of Amenemhat III and Sesostri III. The grooves of the skirt flare out to the corners in a symmetrical pattern rather than from one corner only as in previous royal sculptures. All of these traits indicate a date just prior to 1797 B.C. in the last years of the King's reign and before the decline in workmanship and the exaggerated schematization of musculature that followed almost immediately upon his death. The probable origin of our figure at Karnak confirms the general impression of Upper Egyptian, that is Theban, workmanship.

The profoundly moving impact of this fine sculpture from one of the greatest periods of sculptural achievement is a visual and tectonic one. Something of its power can be paralleled in words from a poem written in homage to Amenemhat III by one of his high officials.

" He is understanding, which is in the hearts, and his eyes search out every body

..... He has filled the Two Lands with strength and life.

The nostrils become cool when he inclineth to terror. When he is gracious then men breathe the air.

He giveth vital force to them that serve him, he supplieth food to them that tread his path, the King is Vital Force and his mouth abundance"¹

The new figure, made possible by The J. H. Wade Fund, joins an already fine collection in the Department of Egyptian Art, headed by Dr. Sherman E. Lee, Director of The Cleveland Museum of Art.

FOOT NOTE

1. A. Erman (tr. A. Blackman) The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians, London, p. 94, "The Instruction of Sehetepibre. "

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